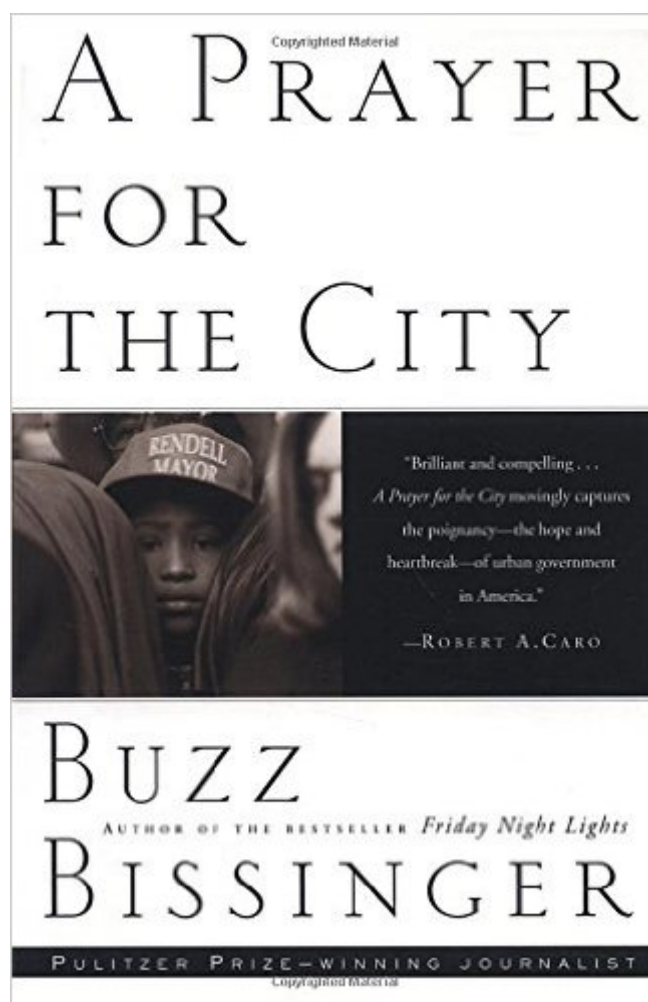


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A Prayer For The City



Synopsis

Current Affairs/Urban Studies "An extraordinary book, an insider's account of the daily workings of a big-city administration."--Witold Rybczynski, *The New York Review of Books* A Prayer for the City is Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Buzz Bissinger's true epic of Philadelphia mayor Ed Rendell, an utterly unique, unorthodox, and idiosyncratic leader who will do anything to save his city: take unions head on, personally lobby President Clinton to save 10,000 defense jobs, or wrestle Smiley the Pig on Hot Dog Day--all the while bearing in mind the eternal fickleness of constituents whose favor may hinge on a missed garbage pick-up or an overzealous meter maid. It is also the story of citizens in crisis: a woman fighting ceaselessly to give her great-grandchildren a better life, a father of six who may lose his job at the Navy Shipyard, and a policy analyst whose experiences as a crime victim tempt her to abandon her job and ideals. Heart-wrenching and hilarious, alive with detail and insight, *A Prayer for the City* describes a city on its knees and the rare combination of political courage and optimism that may be the only hope for America's urban centers. "A Prayer for the City gives a unique insider account. . . . [It] is a superb book. . . . Bissinger's writing, sparse and urgent, always shines . . . and his narrative crackles with descriptive force." --*The Miami Herald* "A full-scale portrait of a struggling American metropolis that brings to mind such classics of urban reportage and analysis as J. Anthony Lukas's *Common Ground* and Nicholas Lemann's *Promised Land*." --*The New York Times Book Review* "What we see through Bissinger's unique lens is profoundly touching and inspiring, poignant and sad. . . . If you really want to feel the heartbeat of the American city--and find a source of hope for its revival--you will find it here." --*The Philadelphia Inquirer*

Book Information

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#187 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Sociology > Urban

Customer Reviews

In many ways, Buzz Bissinger's "A Prayer for the City" is one of the most remarkable books ever written about an American city. In stark and sometimes shocking detail, Bissinger lays out the crises assailing the modern urban core: violence, poverty, economic development, poor public educational systems and so on. What's truly wonderful about Bissinger's book is that he leaves so many questions open. He isn't shallow or dismissive about these urban dilemmas; Bissinger doesn't give pat answers or bromides about how these problems can be solved. And that's a remarkable achievement on the author's part, particularly given the manner in which he structures this book. Though he sketches the lives of several Philadelphia citizens, there are undeniably two central characters in this book: Philadelphia Mayor Ed Rendell and his Chief of Staff David Cohen. In some ways -- and I think Bissinger purposefully and effectively conveys this image - Rendell and Cohen should be seen as two sides of the same coin. Both Rendell and Cohen possess essential characteristics that will be needed in the fight to save the city, but the skills of each are different and, as such, they need each other to do what must be done. Rendell is the affable, easy-mannered, though sometimes short-tempered old politician who is out front. Cohen is the workaholic lawyer whose ruthless attention to the minutiae and detail of public policy brings him 17-hour days and little public glory. The highly public role Rendell plays is laid out in one particularly moving section toward the beginning of the book. Bissinger details a funereal November, 1994 car ride that Rendell took to a city hospital where a police patrolman who had been shot was being treated.

Ed Rendell allowed a writer, Buzz Bissinger, to shadow him during his first term as Mayor of Philadelphia. This book is the result of what Buzz saw during those four years. It provides an extremely candid insight into what Ed Rendell is like as a person while dramatically presenting the difficulties facing a large city Mayor. "A Prayer for the City" also follows the lives of four Philadelphians during this same period. This makes for interesting contrasts that shows how the story of Philadelphia during this era affected people differently. Although, I wonder why, after several years of following a Mayor around, the book did not concentrate more on the Mayor. The book shows Ed Rendell, the person, flaws and strengths. Ed Rendell is presented as a strongly driven man who works hard, knows his goals, and does his best to reach those goals. This is seen in contract negotiations where he knew what he wanted entering, he knew contingencies, and he

knew how to reach his goals, which included allowing others to gain credit and his opposition to come to agreement by being able to walk away from the negotiating table with the ability to claim victory, or else the agreements would never have been reached. Agree or disagree with the result, this ability to engage in complex and strategic thinking and reacting allows readers to conclude that Ed Rendell is a very skilled and driven leader. Ed Rendell is seen as a hard worker, but as one who doesn't react well to overexertion. He is conflicted by the expectations that the Mayor must go to the hospital of any wounded police officer, knowing that a private family time can be seen as being inappropriately disturbed by a politician and the media.

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